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Migration rhetoric in the programs of Ukrainian political parties

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Introduction

According to Ukrainian politicians, in Ukraine the topic of migration became relevant at the parliamentary level during the Orange revolution of 2004, as “in the course of voting it suddenly turned out that some citizens who are in the voting lists in fact do not reside in Ukraine. And society (some people with horror, some with surprise) found out that the country is short of several – in fact many – million citizens”¹.

Indeed, migration policy issues are debated in the Ukrainian Parliament, as far as they have special significance from the standpoint of common national identity formation. At the same time these debates are to a large extent speculative and become active primarily during electoral campaigns, being used by politicians to mobilize their voters. In this context migrants become an object of manipulations and “political games” between parliamentary forces². In general, as analysis shows, such important aspects of migration policy and management, as the rights of Ukrainian diaspora, influx of migrants and departure of Ukrainians, status of national minorities in Ukraine and labor migrants abroad, remain in the periphery of political parties’ interests and their parliamentary activities in the course of Ukrainian independence.

In theory, Ukrainian political parties represented in the Supreme Council (Verkhovna Rada) play a crucial role in formulation of state migration policy, as far as under article 92 of the Ukrainian Constitution the principles of regulation of demographic and migration processes, along with rights of indigenous peoples and national minorities, and combat against racial, national and religious intolerance, are defined by Ukrainian Law. That is why efficiency of migration management in Ukraine depends to a large extent on position of parties represented in the Parliament. However, in practice priorities and tasks of migration regulation and national minority rights reflected in party programs get a rather limited share of attention during day-to-day activities of parliamentary political forces. Moreover, quality of draft laws submitted to be considered by members of parliament on behalf of different political forces is rather low and they often ignore provisions of the current Constitution. Parties uniting into political blocs often disagree in their understanding of migration problems and migration policy principles. As a rule, issues associated with migration are presented not as important on their own account, but rather as one of components of “ethnonational policies”, along with problems of language policy and bilingualism, polyethnicity, status of national minorities and ethnic tolerance etc. For to these reasons, according to experts, Ukrainian migration policy is characterized by fragmentation and contradiction. The goal of constructing a civilized European state in Ukraine unites representatives of different political forces, giving them an opportunity to adopt necessary laws and join the important international agreements. However, rudimentary autarchic thinking along with objective economic and political difficulties, lack of experience and proper understanding of significance of migration issues, explain serious policy faults seen in practice³. Researchers see the reason for such situation in the fact that after the country gained independence, many political parties were formed not as institutions representing interests of society in the governmental bodies, but rather as a form of legitimation for certain elite groups (business, bureaucratic, political), giving them publicity and lobbying opportunities in the Supreme Council⁴.

¹ The eighth forum of German-Ukrainian civil society “Kiev Dialogues: Migration as a European Challenges Based on Case Study of Ukraine”, 29 February 2012, Berlin. <http://www.ustream.tv/recorded/20779556> Accessed at: 10.44.

² Bilan, Y., Lapshyna, I. Vdovtsova, S., Vollmer, B. (2010). Justification of selection of regions. Eumagine project, Oxford: Centre on Migration, Policy and Society.

³ Malinovska O. (2010). Migration policy of Ukraine: State and development prospects. Analytical report. Kiev: National Institute for Strategic Studies.

⁴ Topalova S.O. (2006). Political parties as actors of state power in Ukraine // Relevant issues of public administration. Collection of research papers. – Kharkov, No. 2 (28), part 1. P. 148 – 156.

Positions of political parties with regards to migration policy

The sixth convocation is the latest convocation of the Ukrainian Supreme Council (2007-2012). It is composed of the following parties: Party of Regions (175 seats), Bloc of Yulia Tymoshenko (156 seats), Our Ukraine (72 seats), Communist Party (27 seats), Lytvyn Bloc (20 seats).

Party of Regions

On behalf of the party a draft law was submitted on introduction of changes into some Ukrainian legal acts on migration. This draft law aimed to establish proper legal foundations to strengthen the fight against illegal migration, improve migration management, and strengthen legal responsibility for violations in this field. However, this draft law was returned for revision. Member of parliament from this party Valery Konovalyuk and Vasily Gritsak initiated the study “State and Prospects of Migration Policy in Ukraine” aimed to evaluate the scale of the problem and develop the means to counteract negative consequences of increasing outflow of workforce from the country. The results of study carried out in April-May 2011 were announced by the working group comprising experts and journalists at the round table “Migration policy in Ukraine: Implementation Practice, Problems and Prospects”.

Yulia Tymoshenko Bloc. Comprises all-Ukrainian Union “Fatherland”, Ukrainian Social Democratic Party, and Reforms and Order Party.

Position of the bloc with regards to migration is evasive and speculative, placing an emphasis on the status of labor migrants primarily before elections, in order to win over voters. Bloc MPs submitted a draft law to the Verkhovna Rada to introduces changes to the Ukrainian law “On refugees” and improve the procedure of granting a refugee status in Ukraine. However this draft law was recalled.

Our Ukraine – People’s Self-Defense Bloc. Unites nine parties: People’s Union Our Ukraine, Forward, Ukraine!, People's Movement of Ukraine, Ukrainian People's Party, Ukrainian Republican Party Assembly (“Sobor”), European Party of Ukraine, Christian Democratic Union, Civil Party “Pora”, and Motherland Defenders Party.

Almost all Bloc parties pay attention to national minorities. In the program of People’s Union Our Ukraine it is noted that that the government ought to take care of development of national cultures, religions, spirituality of each citizen and the whole society. The program emphasizes: “Social dialogue and compromise ought to replace political speculations and enmity among people. Ukraine will be the place of peaceful coordination of interests, dissemination of tolerance and mutual understanding in the world, rather than a zone of clash between global centers of influence”.

People's Movement of Ukraine (Narodny Rukh) also stands for the right of national minorities to study their language, create cultural and educational societies and communities, theaters and concerts groups, arrange publications in their own language, and cherish national and cultural traditions. The movement stands for harmonization of international relations, taking into account the interests of both ethnic majority and national minorities, as well as elimination of factors contributing to ethnic tension and conflicts.

Lytvyn Bloc. Consists of two political parties: People’s Party and Labor Party.

Experts consider Lytvyn Bloc as one of political forces that does in fact pay attention to migration processes, though its attention is primarily declaratory and it does not offer any specific steps or efficient measures for migration management. People’s Party focuses on the problem of consequences of illegal migration to Ukraine, underlining in its program that the government in its migration policy must primarily defend the interests of Ukrainian citizens and prevent illegal entry of citizens of other states. At the same time it is emphasized that when applying immigration quota the government ought to be guided not only by threats associated with mass immigration, but also by the urgent challenges it

faces. Bloc MPs submitted a draft law on introducing changes to the Ukrainian law “On immigration” (to remove immigration quotas for certain categories) and co-authored the draft law “On foundations of state migration policy of Ukraine” (2008).